



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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District Court Judge Sentences Owner Of Vasquez Harvesting To 78 Months Incarceration and Fines Him \$125,000 For Conspiring To Bring Aliens To The United States For Commercial Advantage Which Resulted In the Death Of One Of The Aliens

PHOENIX, ARIZONA –The United States Attorneys Office for the District of Arizona, announces that on April 4, 2003, Francisco Vasquez-Torres, D.O.B 10-8-55, of Lake Placid, Florida, was sentenced to 78 months incarceration and fined \$125,000, by United States District Judge Earl H. Carroll, in Phoenix, Arizona.

On May 19, 2001, a group of twenty-six(26) Mexican nationals, primarily from Vera Cruz and La Paz, Baja, Mexico, were smuggled into the United States near Lukeville, Arizona, by Mexican guides. The guides were working on behalf of a large scale, Mexico based, smuggling organization. Defendant Vasquez-Torres, owner and operator of Vasquez Harvesting, a fruit harvesting business located in Lake Placid, Florida, conspired and agreed with those in the smuggling organization to bring five(5) of the Mexican nationals from La Paz, Baja, Mexico, to work at Vasquez Harvesting. Defendant Vasquez-Torres

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paid the smuggling fee for each of the five(5) Mexican nationals. The nationals were then to repay defendant from their wages while working at Vasquez Harvesting.

Between May 19 and May 23, 2001, the group of twenty-six(26) Mexican nationals was lead by guides through the desert of southeastern Arizona in a futile attempt to reach a predetermined point on Arizona State Highway 85 just north of Ajo, Arizona. From that point the group was to have been transported by automobile to Phoenix, Arizona, where they would await subsequent transportation to other destinations throughout the United States where their employment had been secured.

The majority of the group's members exhausted their supply of water during the second day of their journey. On May 20, 2001, two of the nationals abandoned the ill fated attempt and returned to Mexico. Those that remained were repeatedly told by guides that their destination was a short distance away. The guides were actually leading the group in the wrong direction and were moving further away from Ajo into an uninhabited portion of the desert.

During the final two days, fourteen(14) of the nationals perished as a result of severe dehydration and heat stroke. Twelve(12) others were rescued on May 23, 2001, at various areas throughout the desert.

Defendant Vasquez-Torres admitted to investigating Border Patrol Agents that he had used the Mexico based smuggling organization over a period of two years to bring Mexican nationals to work at Vasquez Harvesting. Defendant further admitted that he would profit in his business by using these Mexican nationals.

Vasquez-Torres had been found guilty by jury on July 2, 2002, of conspiring to bring aliens to the United States, for the purposes of commercial advantage and private financial gain, persons he knew were aliens, at a place other than a designated point of entry, which resulted in the death of one or more of those persons.

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The investigation in this case was conducted by the United States Border Patrol and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, together with the Yuma and Pima County Sheriff's Offices.

The prosecution was handled by Thomas C. Simon, Assistant United States Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix, Arizona.

CASE NUMBER: CR-01-821-PHX-EHC
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